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5. PARTIAL ALBINISM IN BLACK IBIS *PSEUDIBIS PAPILLOSA*

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Albinism is the absence of the pigment melanin in organisms. Albinism in birds has been classified into four groups (Pettingill 1956). Total albinism is complete absence of melanin; incomplete albinism is lack of pigment either in the plumage, eyes or unfeathered parts, but never all three. In Imperfect albinism melanin is reduced either in the plumage, eyes, or unfeathered parts. Partial albinism is total absence of melanin from only a few feathers; the pigment-free areas may be symmetrical or asymmetrical.

On August 18, 2009, at 11:00 hrs, during our 3-year study at Kharodo between Miyasana and Nandali village, situated in Mehsana district, north Gujarat (23° 55' N; 72° 38' E), 5 km far from Kheralu, we observed asymmetrical partial albinism in a Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* feeding in a small flock. This is the first record of asymmetrical partial albinism in Black Ibis from this area (Fig. 1).

Albinism in birds has been reported in the past: Great-tail Grackle (Phillips 1954), House Wren and Carolina Wren (Ross 1963), Carolina Wren (Seneca 1985), Hooded Crow (Slagsvold *et al.* 1987), Black Drongo (Prasad 2000), and Red-vented Bulbul (Patel 2009).

Total albinism is caused due to complete lack of tyrosinase activity in the organism. Mechanisms leading to partial loss of tyrosinase activity in birds has not been elucidated, but presumably involve mutations or other known mechanisms of gene inactivation.

Fig. 1: Asymmetrical partial albinism observed in a small flock of Black Ibis

The observation that some families of birds are more prone to albinism than others is interesting, but the biological causes underlying these observations remain unclear. Hopefully, continued documentation of aberrant plumages in all families of birds will eventually lead to generation of testable hypotheses to explain these fascinating and striking plumage patterns.

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6. FIRST RECORD: SELECTION OF AN ELECTRIC POLE AS A ROOSTING SITE BY BLACK IBIS IN NORTH GUJARAT REGION

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We observed 72 Indian Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* on a giant electric pole on the roadside, and 42 on another electric pole off the road at Vasaniya Mahadev (23° 19' N; 72° 38' E, 89 m above msl), Gujarat, when we were returning from Gandhinagar on December 25, 2009, at 18:05 hrs. We stopped our car and waited for sunset, after sunset we could hear the Indian Black Ibis call. We waited for two hours to confirm if this was a roosting site of the Indian Black Ibis. We also asked the local people who confirmed that Indian Black Ibis gathered to roost on electric poles. On earlier occasions (three to four times) we have noted similar behaviour on the outskirts of Visnagar (23°42' N; 71°34' E, 127 m above msl), Gujarat; where five to seven Black Ibis were observed roosting on an electric pole (Eds: photographic evidence provided). This, however, is the first record of a flock of Black Ibis roosting on electric poles.

During a three-year period we had observed Indian Black Ibis usually roosting on tall trees like Nilgiri *Eucalyptus globulus*, Neem *Azadirachta indica,* Mango *Mangifera indica*, Polyalthia *Polyalthia longifolia* and species of *Ficus*. Several authors (Chavda 1988; Vyas 1992; Chavda 1997; Soni 2008) have noted that Black Ibis use tall trees like *Cocos nucifera*, *Borassus flabellifer*, *Roystonea regia*, *Millingtonia hortensis*, *Polyalthia cerasoides*, *Ficus amplissima*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Sterculia foetida*, *Ficus religiosa*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Albizia lebbeck* for roosting. They are part of a single or multi species communal roost. Usually the birds select the largest trees in the vicinity, probably because such trees are safer than the shorter trees. But selection of a giant electric pole for roosting might be an adaptive response of the birds to its abnormal height.

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7. OCCURRENCE OF THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD *ARDEOTIS NIGRICEPS* IN BIKANER REGION OF THE THAR DESERT

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Great Indian Bustard (hereafter, GIB) *Ardeotis nigriceps* is an endangered bird species of India (Islam and Rahmani 2002) and is the state bird of Rajasthan. According to an estimate of Rahmani and Manakadan (1990) the total number